

Defense Collaboration Tool Suite Enables Warfighter Planning During Operation Iraqi Freedom

The Defense Collaboration Tool Suite (DCTS) is the DoD/Joint Staff tool suite for interoperable collaboration built to standards mandated by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Its capabilities meet operational and administrative requirements across echelons, joint mission areas and national boundaries. The Collaboration Management Office (CMO), and DISA's Center for Combat Support Capability, serve as the DCTS program office.

DCTS provides combatant commands, military Services and Defense agencies with an interoperable, real-time, asynchronous collaboration capability that includes voice and video conferencing, document and application sharing, instant messaging, virtual meeting, and whiteboard capability in support of defense planning.

DISA was initially tasked by the Joint Staff to field 40 DCTS systems to the nine combatant commands, but once the value of DCTS was recognized the requirement grew. Initial fielding of the original DCTS sites began in April 2002. A little more than a year later DCTS is installed at 104 sites worldwide, and another 51 sites will be installed by the end of 2003 at all combatant commands, their major components and in all military Services.

"The DCTS program management organization serves as the proponent for DCTS and leads and manages the DCTS effort DoD-wide," said the program manager for DCTS. "It ensures that DCTS policies, processes, plans, programs and procedures are fully synchronized, integrated and institutionalized." The DCTS PM's management strategy is designed to be as streamlined as possible while maintaining the discipline of configuration management required to have an effective and secure collaboration system. The system is designed to enhance the exchange of information and meet current and emerging operators' needs for collaboration.

Initially, U. S. Central Command (CENTCOM) was provided with six DCTS systems by DISA to support operations within their area of responsibility. However, as war preparations progressed, CENTCOM recognized the benefits of DCTS and purchased a number of additional systems. At the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), 14 DCTS systems had been fielded in geographically dispersed rear and forward CENTCOM and component locations.

After hostilities began, DISA provided another DCTS system to support mobile military operations. In addition to CENTCOM staff, elements of U.S. Army V Corps deployed to OIF with 10 ruggedized DCTS systems. Six additional DCTS-equipped tactical Army units from the United States flowed into the theater of operations to support V Corps.

DCTS program office collaboration with CENTCOM and V Corps was considerable. Prior to OIF, DISA personnel supported DCTS during Exercise Internal Look at CENTCOM and V Corps' Victory Strike exercises, held as precursors to hostilities. The exercises provided both commands an opportunity to develop DCTS tactics, techniques and procedures for wartime use, while at the same time giving the DCTS program office team an opportunity to apply lessons learned to ensure DCTS met warfighter needs.



Deployed members of CENTCOM use the Defense Collaboration Tool Suite. CENTCOM photo.

Both CENTCOM and V Corps used DCTS extensively during OIF. According to CENTCOM personnel, DCTS enabled them to conduct mission planning at a new level. DCTS was used daily to coordinate numerous operational requirements between CENTCOM (forward) and many of the component commands' headquarters. The use of DCTS grew exponentially as more and more operational elements requested DCTS accounts to collaborate within and to the CENTCOM (forward) headquarters daily.

CENTCOM staff personnel cited DCTS as a combat multiplier to users that directly supported combat operations. CENTCOM (rear) not only used DCTS for combat operations, but also used DCTS to conduct real-time collaboration to a large number of Army officers attending senior Army leadership schooling at the Army War College, Carlisle, Pa. This use of DCTS enabled the students to conduct collaboration sessions with a wide variety of CENTCOM war planners who were involved in OIF planning operations.

V Corps used DCTS to conduct "battle rhythm" updates twice daily when not conducting combat operations. (Battle rhythm describes those events that a unit conducts on a recurring basis to facilitate conditions for success.) Each major subordinate command joined the conference from their remote location via the V Corps tactical network. The V Corps commander and staff used DCTS during ongoing operations and to plan future operations.

Using the Joint Enroute Mission Planning Rehearsal System (JEMPRS), which includes DCTS components, V Corps command and control vehicles (C2V) gave the commander the capability to do everything on the move including using DCTS. As explained by a V Corps officer, DCTS provided the warfighter with greater capabilities. He marveled at these capabilities and said, "Think of it, we are in the TAC (tactical) command post in Iraq and our G-3 is working the next operation with the main command post in Kuwait ... pretty powerful stuff."

DISA support to the success of DCTS during OIF was extensive and a great example of the teamwork between CENTCOM and V Corps staffs, DISA National Capital Region (NCR), DISA field offices, and Regional Network Operations Security Centers (RNOSCs). The DCTS program office provided 24x7 government and contractor support to CENTCOM headquarters, rear and forward, and to the RNOSC in Bahrain and Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia. In addition, the DCTS team quickly responded to support emerging requirements and technical issues. □